

DAILY OKLAHOMAN
6 September 1980

Politically Sensitive 'Secrets' Buried,

By Jack Taylor
Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — For the last eight months, sensitive U.S. intelligence information has been handled under a new and unusual system that effectively cuts off most congressional, military and other government officials, sources familiar with the system told The Daily Oklahoman Friday.

The new security classification system was secretly ordered by President Carter on Jan. 7. It installed a classification called "Royal" above the previous highest classification, "Top Secret," the sources said.

The "Royal" system is considered highly unusual by the intelligence community because it is vague and general in scope and is not associated with protecting sensitive sources or particularly sensitive information.

The five sources, all of whom deal with extremely sensitive intelligence on a daily basis, contend the "Royal" classification is intended primarily to protect only politically sensitive information.

The real effect, the five sources contend, is protecting President Carter from potential embarrassment.

However, an administration official said Friday, "Those allegations are totally false."

The official denied that "Royal" is in use, saying it is part of a classification system that has not yet been implemented by the government.

"It's part of a new and still un-implemented system for handling extremely sensitive classified information," the official said. "Within that system, 'Royal' is only one of many designations."

The five sources say the type of intelligence classified in "Royal" is sometimes of more significance from a political than an intelligence viewpoint.

For example, some intercepted diplomatic cable traffic among Libyan diplomats was given the "Royal" treatment — including the cable in which the Libyans described the President's brother, Billy, as "our agent of influence."

Other information classified "Royal," and therefore restricted to only a handful of officials in government, according to the sources, has included:

— Reports surfacing early this year, sup-

pressed for two months within the intelligence community, that the Soviet Union had conducted tests in November of a new surface-to-air missile, the SA-10. The administration still has not acknowledged the reports, though they have become an issue in Congress because of the potential violation of both the Anti-Ballistic Missile and SALT I treaties.

— The more significant reports about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, including details that the administration had received its first intelligence, based on deployment of initial small units of Soviet troops, weeks before the actual infusion of enough troops to call it an invasion.

"All 'Royal' does is institutionalize this sort of thing," one source said. "Nobody sees the information, so it can never become an issue."

The new system is so restrictive that even the National Intelligence Daily, a summary sent to only 100 key individuals in government, has become devoid of meaningful information — or, as one senator put it privately, "lifeless."

The very existence of the "Royal" system is so secret that many members of Congress, military officers and other government officials who have "Top Secret" clearances don't even know it exists.

Rep. Philip M. Crane, an Illinois Republican who was an early presidential candidate this year, was surprised when asked about it Friday.

"I've never heard of it," he said. "But it's certainly intriguing and I intend to find out about it."

Only eight members of Congress — four senators and four congressmen — have been given access to "Royal" information.

In the Senate, they are Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind.; Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz.; Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., and Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va.

The only congressional staff members given access are the staff directors of the Senate and House intelligence committees.

But because "Royal" information is closely held, even the eight members of Congress are unlikely to be aware of its daily digest unless they take the time to go to intelligence committee offices each day to read it, the sources said.

"When you establish something this restrictive, you, in effect, deny access to the minority party, which could have an effect on policy," one source said. "In fact, it is against administration policy which requires making all verifications and SALT violations available to all parties."

Politically sensitive information such as some intercepted Libyan diplomatic cables concerning Billy Carter never get to Republican members of Congress, the sources said, because the system is effectively controlled by the administration.

General intelligence information is classified "Confidential," "Secret" or "Top Secret."

There are special code name classifications beyond "Top Secret" for communications intelligence, satellite photography, intelligence collection methods and cryptographic technology.

But, unlike "Royal," which fits the broader category of general intelligence, all "code names" deal with sources of collecting information.

According to one of the sources knowledgeable about "Royal," Zbigniew Brzezinski, the president's national security adviser who personally picked the word "Royal," wrote Adam Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA, that the new system is designed to protect the product regardless of the source.

"That translates," said one source "to protecting politically sensitive, potentially embarrassing information."

Ostensibly, the sources said, the directive implementing this system states that it is intended to provide selective key policymakers with advanced intelligence so they can formulate positions that will appear, publicly at least, more timely and responsive should a subject of the reports become an issue.